

ANIMALS - BIRDS

Observations

BU JOSEPH LUND

Another week of hot enervating, weather has kept our bird activities to a minimum. We had planned to go to Saquish Beach on Friday to check out the shorebird populations in the cool breezes from the Plymouth Harbor channel but failed to get there when our faithful jeep died of spark failure just beyond High Pines. After organizing a rescue mission aided by a pair of jeep drivers from the Gurnet, and a tow truck from Jonesies in Marshfield, we finally had our picnic with our guests right back here at home. Not bad fun but nerve shattering and totally unproductive in the avian and cooling off departments.

We presume that Mrs. Barlow, who accused me of being a Grinch, will say that the mishap was justly deserved. Further comments on her last week's letter will be found on the letters to the editor page; Mrs. O. comes to my defense. I would like to know if Mrs. Barlow is less bothered by the "obscene" sounds of duck hunters' activities now that she has moved to Powder Point from Standish Shore where we first encountered her critical effusions in December, 1978.

We have just received the record of birds banded at Manomet during the first 6 months of this year as compared to the similar listing for 1979. It was of special interest for us to note that both total numbers and species were higher this year than last. Among the most common varieties Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Cat birds, Magnolia Warblers, Yellowthroats, Red-Starts, Red Wing Blackbirds and White throated Sparrows were all much more plentiful. Only Yellow Rumped (Myrtle) Warblers and Grackles showed a marked decrease. We don't understand about the grackles as we have been overrun by them here ever since they arrived in March.

The other day Dr. George Gardner asked me where the blue jays were and I answered that our impression was that they had made a great comeback since the winter of 1977-1978 when they virtually disappeared from this area. MBO banded 204 this year as compared to 163 in 1979. Perhaps they've changed their local residences away from Dr. G.'s territory.

Another item of interest to your observer was the banding of 150 fly catchers of 9 species up from 46 total of 8 species the previous year. This is in direct contrast to our experience in finding these useful chaps so far this season. Another group with gains

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were the thrushes which we've found almost impossible to catch up with so far. Perhaps it's another case of being at the right place at the wrong time or vice versa.

The killdeer in the fields near the Alden School apparently had a successful nesting season. There was a lively group of 12 playing on the baseball diamond on Saturday morning. Perhaps I should have said feeding, but I still can't get those Red Sox out of my mind.

On the same day we heard the lovely musical trill of the field sparrow at Millbrook. When we were first in Duxbury they were regular spring visitors near our house and nested in small numbers near the golf course along Harrison St. In recent years we have rarely found them except in a popular sparrow haven near the Plymouth Airport. The only one seen earlier this year was a late winter straggler at our feeders in early January.

Over the weekend we had a visit with Brian Harrington, the expert shore and sea bird biologist at MBO. He confirmed our opinion that the egrets and herons at Clark's Island had a successful breeding season. He was interested to learn that our counts of the larger common egret were higher as his nest count on the island early in the year showed a reduction in number. He also reported that all the other heron colonies in eastern Mass. produced less young than in the last few years except for black-crowned night herons.

All the local and Cape Cod tern colonies including Plymouth had excellent success, with the exception of our least terns on Duxbury Beach which, as reported earlier, moved away some time in June.

We also discussed the various shorebird species which have been mentioned since the arrival of dowitchers in large numbers on July 9. Except for that one sighting the dowitcher population is much lower than usual. The rather similar red knots, on the other hand, are very plentiful at the beach where the North River flows into the ocean at Scituate. We don't know why, but that small stretch of coastline is one of the most popular spots for this species along the entire Atlantic coast. I can personally vouch for their presence there more than 50 years ago.

Brian also confirmed our observation of last week where we mentioned the tremendous increase in numbers of semi-palmated plover. This small saltwater cousin of the killdeer, with a single black ring around its white neck, is the most colorful of the smaller group of shore line feeders.

We are also glad to report the early arrival of young laughing gulls from their nesting grounds on the islands south of Cape Cod. They can be identified by their small size, dark wings and bodies except for light gray and white underparts.
